

Andean Report by Carlos Méndez

Retirees march in self-defense

For the first time in the history of Peru, pensioners are demonstrating against malthusian austerity policies.

More than 3,000 members of Peru's Association of Retired Workers (ASTRAJU), many of them ill and on crutches, staged an unprecedented march down the center of Peru's capital city on Oct. 6, to denounce the "pensions of death" and the service of "slow but effective death" that the Peruvian Institute of Social Security (IPSS) is dealing them. They demanded repeal of the austerity package imposed one month earlier by political forces inside the Alan García government working for that country's reconciliation with the International Monetary Fund.

The march began in front of IPSS offices with a press conference given by Carlos Pastor, the president of the ASTRAJU, and concluded five miles away in Lima's central Plaza San Martín, where thousands more demonstrators, either too elderly or too ill for the march, awaited them.

Heading the demonstration was a 70-year-old woman bearing the Peruvian flag, while other marchers carried signs describing the government's shock policies as "100 Times Worse than Hitler," and demanding "Down with IMF Genocide." Other signs insisted, "Life Is Sacred," "We Are Retirees, Not Beggars," and "Viva Life. More Increases, Fewer Traitors!"

The marchers were cheered by thousands of onlookers and anti-IMF organizations, among them the Peruvian chapter of the Club of Life, of which ASTRAJU's Pastor is a member. So forceful was the retirees' message on the immorality of the austerity policies, that the police, sent out to

stop the demonstration, ended up escorting the elderly marchers to the Plaza San Martín, an event covered as the lead item by national newspapers and television.

The protests against starvation pensions are nothing new. One marcher showed reporters his pension card, which revealed an income of 6,350 intis, or less than \$15 per month. But the straw that broke the camel's back was the Oct. 4 announcement by the president of the central bank that the government had run out of funds and would be unable to meet promised pension increases to retirees and unemployed affiliated with the IPSS. It also announced that all pension payments would be delayed for nearly two weeks, something which in present-day Peru could spell death for the elderly.

The truth is that the so-called *paquetazo*, or austerity package, has wreaked havoc. In just one month, the policy has produced over 100,000 new unemployed, and a 50% decline in real wages. The cost of basic food items and medicine has increased by 800%, placing them beyond the reach of most Peruvians. The vice-president of the National Agrarian Federation (CNA) warned on Oct. 5 that food production for the 1988-89 season will drop by 45%, because the austerity program is hiking production costs.

On Oct. 5, some 9,000 Lima doctors staged a symbolic strike to demand the resignation of Health Minister Luis Pinillos, in protest against the collapse of the majority of the country's social security hospitals, as a result of the exhaustion of the final

quarter's hospital budgetary allotments—by September!

On Oct. 5, Peruvian Cardinal Landázuri issued a pastoral appeal urging Peruvians to put aside their passivity and demonstrate "their solidarity in practice." And on Oct. 15, Monsignor Albano Quinn, Bishop of Sicuani, issued a pastoral letter characterizing the government's austerity package as "measures of death." "We are seeing mothers returning with empty baskets from the marketplace; the ill returning from pharmacies without their medicine; and students abandoning their classes for lack of means to survive; peasants abandoning their farms and workers fearful of the specter of unemployment."

In his address at the Plaza San Martín, Carlos Pastor said, "I want to speak to you not only as what we are, retirees, but also as citizens of the Republic. . . . We have met here because we are tired of having our dignity, our morality, offended, by these people at the Peruvian Institute of Social Security who are following malthusian policies which can be compared with the tragic moments of Hitler's time. Triage was Hitler's policy to eliminate children and the elderly, because they were 'useless eaters,' and now they wish to place us too in that category. . . . The proof is in the *paquetazo*, or rather, the *narco-paquetazo*."

In a communiqué directed to Alan García personally, the ASTRAJU demanded that the President shut down Ocoña Street, the center for entry of drug-dollars into the economy. They also demanded an all-out war against the drug trade, of the type García had once attempted to fight, and the adoption of a policy for real economic development. All malthusian policies, such as the bill under debate to legalize "voluntary sterilization," must be rejected, the communiqué demanded.